

with a few old political friends from Texas, I remarked, "This may be the last time you'll have to leave Washington. With Goldwater as your opponent you can run the entire campaign from the White House."

Johnson turned toward me, his manner suddenly serious: "You fellows ought to stop talking about being happy about Goldwater. Suppose there is a heart attack or something. Goldwater is a mean, vindictive little man. After I accepted the vice-presidency he wrote me the worst letter I have ever received. He said it was demeaning of me to accept an office under someone who was my inferior, who didn't have my ability or my experience. He is nasty and petty, with a warm handshake, and a pleasing façade." Then he paused, smiling warmly to reassure me he had meant no rebuke. "Let's get that speech finished, boys, the whole world is waiting for you." And so it was. But not for us.

The campaign itself was a politician's dream. From the beginning, the only issue was not victory or defeat, but the size of the inevitable triumph. Absent a scientific miracle — i.e., the rejuvenation of Eisenhower with glandular transplant — it is unlikely that any Republican could have defeated Johnson. Not only was the country at peace, but Kennedy in his last year had reduced Cold War tensions to their lowest point since World War II. We were in the middle of a sustained economic boom, and without inflation. Moreover, Johnson had not only inherited the Kennedy constituency (at the time of his death, JFK had the approval of about 70 percent of the electorate), but had expanded it to the doubtful and unaffected with the impressive performance of his first year in office.

Adding to the abundance of our advantages, the Republican party — seemingly determined to forfeit whatever slim chance it had — nominated the leader and hero of the semi-ideological right, whose views were far from what was then the mainstream of American politics. We watched the Republican convention in delight as the delegates, determined to exile the once-ruling moderate eastern wing of the party, shouted a cacophony of hate and disapproval at Nelson Rockefeller; and we could hardly contain our pleasure as the candidate himself confirmed the country's worst fears by proclaiming that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice," demonstrating that even a cliché — in the wrong place and from the wrong man — could be powerfully self-destructive.

Remembering America - Gordon

Moreover, Goldwater's path to his party's leadership was strewn with statements (partly careless, partly calculated to win the allegiance of the Republican right, which now was in control of the party structure) that, if properly incorporated into our arsenal of attack, were certain to frighten away large numbers of moderate voters. He had, for example, proposed virtually to dismantle social security; observed that the country would be a better place if we could saw off the Eastern Seaboard and send it out to sea; and discussed nuclear weapons as if they were merely magnified hand grenades, advocating that the decision to use them be entrusted not to the commander-in-chief alone, but to combat commanders in the field. As a result, the issue of the campaign was not the Democratic record, not liberalism, not Lyndon Johnson — but Barry Goldwater himself. It was an incumbent's dream, and a challenger's nightmare. (George McGovern was to place himself in a similar position in 1972, and with the same result.)

Every morning a group of us — Bill Moyers, Jack Valenti, myself, Clark Clifford, Larry O'Brien — met on the first, or presidential, floor of the West Wing to discuss campaign strategy, to give instructions to the field, prepare responses to the latest Republican tactics. Upstairs Mike Feldman presided over a parallel meeting of what we called, in those days of innocence, the "Department of Dirty Tricks," whose energies were devoted to finding ways of confronting the Republican candidate with his own most damaging statements and positions — planting questions, producing placards for demonstrators, etc. — trying to make every campaign stop an arena for Goldwater v. Goldwater. In retrospect, the efforts to keep the Feldman operation secret, even the name stowed on his activities, seem amusingly naïve. It would have been better if Richard Nixon to teach us what "Dirty Tricks" really meant.

At one of our earliest meetings, toward the end of August, Johnson entered unannounced and took a seat at the end of the table facing his close and trusted friend Clark Clifford: "Now, let's hear what you have in mind for me." For about twenty minutes we continued to debate a variety of proposed strategies, but Johnson interrupted. "You fellows are the experts," he said. "This is how I see it. I'm the president. That's our greatest strength. And I don't want to piss it away by getting down in the mud with Barry. . . . My daddy once told me about the time a fire broke out in a three-story building in Johnson City. Old Man Hutton was trapped on the third floor and the fire ladder was